

The Drug History of Lowell

[Just before he died, the narrator of this history was interviewed at length by a local artist. What follows is the history he told. May he rest in peace.]

Back in the late 50's -- what year is this?

It's '99.

Are you sure?

'99

Don't shit me. '99? It's been a long ride.

I don't believe the fucking shit you fucking tell me, because I know that you basically smoke pot. But I knew you met D, and I know you met with Donna. I don't know how long she would have said, "Hey, X, you gotta slow down here."

So, you know, just tell our story.

Let's see. Back in the late 50's when I was a teenager, myself and others, we'd have to acquire alcohol through this black guy we knew, who'd go in and get us beer and whiskey in the package store

He had a connection. This was I'd say like '59, '60, right around there. He had a connection in a drug store, and he used to get us pills. He mentioned it one time, while going in the drug store, he had to get pills in there. We had heard about, you know, what pills can do.

Now, back then there was no pot., and ...

No, no, no, not at all. There was a scattered few that probably brought pot from New York, but there was no pot smoking going on and all that shit. In fact we even smoked some that was home grown and shit, you know. I mean, it came and went, but there was no acceptance by anybody. It was supposedly a bad crazy drug, you know.

But this guy, he would go in the drug store, and he would get -- for us -- either benzedrine or dexedrine. There were a handful, six or seven of us, and he'd get the dexedrine for six cents a pill, and the benzedrine for ten cents a pill. That's speed. Speed. You'd speed your ass off, and

that's what we used to do. The pills of dexedrine weren't as strong as the benzedrine. But now, I mean you'd probably pay five bucks a pill, if you could get them, but I don't know if they even exist any more, you know.

Of course there were black beauties back then too, the real thing -- one of them, and psheew, you'd speed right out of your underwear.

So this was in the 50's, so a lot of people didn't think of getting drugs from drugstore, or did some people ..

O yeah, there were a handful around Lowell that did speed, but that's about the only thing that I'd ever do, back then. And, so we used to speed our ass off. And we'd give him a list, you know, we'd ask each other "How many do you want?" "How many do you want?" And out of maybe seven or eight of us, and we'd probably want about 104 benzedrine and 77 dexedrine, and he'd add them all up and go to the drugstore and get them for us, and we'd get him a pint of Seagrams for doing it.

So, did he have to have a script?

No, he knew the guy. This was in south Lowell, the corner of Woburn and ??, way out in that area, there was a drugstore out there, way back. You know, we're talking thirty years ago..

Thirty? Forty...

Forty fucking years ago.

It's forty years ago. We're talking like '59. It's before the 60's.

Right, right. So we'd -- Friday, Saturday night, we'd be speeding our asses off the whole weekend. And our parents wondered why we didn't eat much.

[laughter]

Why we stayed up all night listening to music. And it just didn't figure, you know, everybody'd be like grinding their teeth, fucking eyes would be popped out like a stomped on bull frog, you know.

We'd do that for a while, and then, somewhere shortly after that, like early 60's, or so, '60, '61, I was introduced to codeine cough syrup. And, once again, there was very few in the city that were doing that -- a handful, you know, our own handful. We hung around a restaurant up

on High Street called Bee's. It had a reputation for like a kick-ass bar, but it was a restaurant. A lot of people went there after hours, and like, ate and all that shit, you know. And we hung around there, you know -- it was kind of a tough restaurant -- where a lot of fights broke out, and -- I don't want to call it a gang -- there was a large group that hung around there, teenagers. probably anywhere from 20 to 30 of us at any given time.

At that time, did they let the teenagers drink there?

No, no drinking. We used to drink out back, or ..

But you could hang out there?

Yeah, we hung out there. We used to get high and hang out there. Nobody knew quite what was going on, because you know, we'd be, well went we got into the speed, first you know we'd start out grinding our teeth, with our eyes popped out, and we didn't eat much, so they could kind of ...

Whereas today

But at the restaurant, they weren't too crazy about us hanging around because like we weren't eating much, because we we speeding our asses off and it was you know taking our appetite away, but we did drink a lot of coffee though

[laughter]

But short after that, we were introduced to codeine cough syrup. And in fact back then the very first thing we ever did was Tussar, and of course the favorite of all time was Robitussin AC -- antihistamine and codeine. The anithistamine contributed to a nodding effect, and the codeine of course .. felt good.

And so we got into that, and that was early 60's. And there was probably a dozen or more of us who jumped into it, and started liking it, and sitting in cars, and nodding out and all that shit.

And ah it just wasn't strong enough. We'd build up a tolerance where we'd take a bottle of it -- a whole bottle, too, which was four ounces. You'd pour the four ounces of this goo down into your stomach, you know.

In fact, there was another one, terpin hydrate and codeine. In the service, they called it "GI gin." It was like a whitish color, I think it was,

or a clear color like gin would be. Oh, what a fucking taste! Make your toenails curl, I'll tell you. It had a bite like you'd wouldn't believe it, it tasted orange, like orange peels. But ah you know you'd down the whole bottle. I imagine somebody was getting high on that before us, but... It was like in the military they used to get it and shit, you know what I mean. Cause these things were on the shelf and anybody who wanted to get high could have done so if they had a prescription.

But I don't know who or how many, but we were probably the first group, and we used to do it in a group setting, you know, where we'd all sit around, you know, nod out and drool, all that shit, you know.

And the codeine -- you built up a tolerance after so long, where you take one bottle and you get high a couple of hours and it would wear off. So you know, we got to the point where we were running all over the place. At first you could walk into a drugstore and buy it right off the shelf. Then we got greedy, we were buying two or three. Some guys would get four and five and six bags and shit

[laughter]

They were wondering, you know, what's going on.

[laughter]

And then they put two and two together -- "Oh, people are getting **high**. That's **bad**!" you know. We don't mind them getting drunk and fucking crashing cars and falling down and pissing on their own shoes. But no getting **high**...

[laughter]

So they come up with the idea that you had to sign for it, you know. Most of the time it was okay, but once in a while they'd find your name in a book a couple of times and they'd scold you and point their finger at you and shit, so we just simply, we'd even have somebody else go in there.

There was also paragoric, which they rubbed on the gums of children, you know, teething kids. We used to guzzle that down too, you know. I think we boiled that down or something, I think some guys boiled it and shot it later on in life.

Anyway, I think we were **developing** and not even realizing it. After the book fiasco, where you had to sign for it -- they were -- I guess they

turned the books in and checked them all out and found there were quite a few people going in quite a few times, you know what I mean? So then they made it to where you had to have a prescription, which made it a little tougher, but you know, there were times .. earlier one -- you'd be in a doctor's office, and you'd be in one room and somebody else would be in the other room and there would be this pad of prescriptions, right in front of you, so naturally you'd rip half and walk, you know. Or else you'd get some little pissy ass prescription for something legal, and pay him, then you'd copy the signature. D was good at that, he was an artist, he can draw. He could copy signatures. He used to write up fucking prescriptions for all kinds of little goodies, you know, and he'd sign the doctor's signature, and we'd go into different drugstores.

After a while they got onto that, like they can get onto everything. But that was nice. That was salvation ?? heaven ?? celebration, where we just had all these pieces of paper, and we just walked an and said, "Here!" You know, like, now we've found a new way of getting these things like codeine.

But then like I said in due time we'd build up a tolerance and you had to take several bottles, which was fucking sickening, you know, to pour all this goo down your gullet to get a real good high.

So we started experimenting with other things to take with it, to boost it, to make it last longer and stronger, you know.

[laughter]

So what we dove into was tuinol, seconal, carbitals, you name it, any kind of **down** thing we could get our hands on, we'd take with the codeine, and all that would do was like knock us out, make us fall asleep.

So somebody came along with the idea of trying durridins -- which we would try anything, just to make it last, and shit you know. So durridins ...

What's that?

Codeine with a magic formula. In fact years later, and probably still now, I don't know, I remember about ten or so years ago they came up with this same magic formula and they were putting it in pills and they were calling it PAC or PAK, down around the Boston area, they called it "PAC turk."

They had a capsule that contained codeine and durridin, or whatever is in durridin, and all you had to do was swallow the capsule, which would have made it a lot easier for us back in those days, I'll tell you, we went through a lot of shit trying to...

Especially, I remember the years after it got outlawed in Massachusetts, where you had to have a prescription, we were riding all over New Hampshire, all over the place. There was this one guy amongst us would go into DeMoulas's, you know, then he'd go into the drugstore, and turn in everything -- and he'd have cameras anything you could think of, and he would turn them in, you know, and the pharmacy -- I forget where it was -- would give him things in return.

How many years was it from the time you started to use codeine till you started to mix pills with it?

A couple of years. We just got sick of having to take a lot of cough syrup to get a good high, a good **long** high. You know what I mean? But at the same time you were building up a tolerance, you know. It just got too fucking gooey, you'd shit gooey, you know.

Back then, there wasn't any pot in Lowell, and what else did you do, besides drinking, before pot became popular?

Drinking, that was it. There's different kinds of drinking, you know. I remember I used to get crazy drinking one shot CC with one Budweiser. I used to get real crazy, back in the 50's, you know?

With the codeine, this magic formula with durridins, which is a muscle relaxant, just combined with the codeine, and it would **extend it all night**. You might need a little sip here and there to give it a little more of a boost. But one or two durridins to start with, sometimes even just a half a bottle of cough syrup. Sometimes we'd split a bottle, take two durridins, and -- wow, we used to call it "wacked." We used to get wacked, that's what we used to call it, we used to get wacked.

We had no place to go, because we were kind of teenagers. Things were different in those days. We were 18, 19, 20, somewhere in that neighborhood. And there was no place to go. So we used to luckily once in a while find an apartment, you know, or somebody had an apartment where we could just go and gather and sit there and hang our heads down and drool, all that shit.

And what we'd do also, we'd get in our car, or two cars, and we'd go to the drive-in. There'd be four or five guys in each car, all high as shit. Like on heroin, you know, just with your head hung down, drooling. It

lasted much longer and was much better than heroin. I was no heroin fan, but from what I gathered from the ones that did heroin, they would rather have that [the codeine + durridin], if they could get it, because it just lasted longer.

Nothing else worked like that, nothing else worked with the codeine, except for that, the durridins, and the durridins are a muscle relaxant. We'd get high as shit. We'd leave the drive-in and go home and still be high. The durridins would tend to make you not fall off into a sleep, so that you'd be awake for like most of the night, but not ... -- you know when you nod, you were like a heroin nod, so you could like still hear sounds, and still, you weren't so deep where you'd fall asleep. You know what I mean?

Um-hmh.

We'd sit in cars. We'd go to the drive-in, and we wouldn't even think of watching the picture. We'd be just sitting there nodded out, eight, nine, ten of us, two cars. And I remember so well, back in those days, you know, we'd be nodding in a deep nod, and all of a sudden you'd hear all the cars starting up around you, and it was time to go home. And all the lights would come on. It was like, Whoa, -- wake up time!

[laughter]

You know, you'd come back to the car and somebody'd say, "Where you been man? You've been gone a long time." All you'd be doing is taking a piss, just standing there nodding out while you're pissing. God knows how many people came in and out while I was taking one piss.

Codeine was the big thing. That was the early sixties. I had friends who were totally dedicated and devoted to getting prescriptions, and getting methods of gaining access to it and shit. It wasn't that easy, you know.

Now did you have anybody that knew anybody at a pharmacy to kind of...?

Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was a couple of guys that had a gay pharmacist lined up. There was one guy that had a store detective lined up, where he'd go in and steal a bunch of stuff, and split it with her-- she was a woman. All kinds of methods of obtaining it.

So after the cough syrup, was there anything that you did until pot came?

Oh yeah, psychedelics.

Pot came along probably kind of like the mid 60's.

So the next thing for you was psychedelics, not pot?

Pot first. But the codeine and the concept was very popular. And not amongst that many people. We only had our own little group.

A certain clique

They thought we were drinking, you know. Like a bunch of drunks we'd go to a restaurant and sit there and just hang our heads down, and they thought we were like, some kind of strange drunks.

That's the same thing as I would do when I'd be fucked up on THC back when I was in my twenties. If anybody ever stopped me, I just say that I was drunk.

Yeah, we tried to come across like that, like we'd been drinking. Once in a while, we'd take beer and swish it around in our mouths and spit it out, just so we'd have that smell on our breath. And then if anybody ever smelled our breath, they'd think, "Yeah, they've been drinking all right." But they don't act that way, they're awful sleepy! You know. [laughs heartily].

Yeah, those were the days when it all started around here, because there was nothing in Lowell, nothing to get high on.

So you said sometimes people would bring pot in from New York.

Yeah, from out of state. A friend of mine's father got busted in the early 50's for bringing it up from New York. He was a jazz musician. He made the headlines. My friend's got the newspaper at home. You should ask him about it, when it was. It was the early 50's, and he brought pot in from New York.

I mean, there were scattered things that happened. There were probably people I didn't even know about who were on certain prescriptions, way way way back, 40's, 50's, whatever, that nobody knew about. But I'm talking about groups, groups that got high together.

People think that New York and California and different places were the only places in the country where there were pockets of people getting

fucked up. It seems like Lowell had its own drug culture with, you know .. How did pot start to get popular?

Mid 60's It was the mid-60's. I think it was the psychedelic wave, you know what I mean? Whenever that started. But I think it was like, to the best of my knowledge, I remember in the mid-60's, '64, '65, something like that.

And it was primarily Mexican?

Yeah, but it wasn't bad, because if you weren't smoking anything, it was pretty decent back then.

At first it was Mexican. And when they say a nickel bag and a dime bag, nowadays, that's what it cost in those days.

Five dollars and ten dollars?

Yeah.

Well I think when I bought pot is was like twenty dollars for an ounce.

That's where it started out. Way way back is was fifteen or twenty an ounce. Then they broke it up into five dollar and ten dollar bags. And the names still remain.

Nickel, dime

Yeah. The name. People nowadays must be confused because somebody will say, I want a nickel bag, but what's a nickel bag, what does that mean? It's just a name. But in those days, it meant something. It meant a five dollar bag

It meant a quarter of an ounce.

Yeah. What's a nickel bag nowadays, forty, fifty, somewhere around there?

A quarter of an ounce, if you don't buy an ounce -- it would probably be fifty bucks a quarter.

Back then it was five bucks a quarter. That's when it started, because pounds back then were probably anywhere from a hundred to a hundred and thirty. That's how it all started, with Mexican pot, basically, basically. And then, shortly thereafter, probably in the late 60's, early

70's, there came Columbian pot, which was really ass kicking, but very very seedy, very seedy.

Well I remember in the 70's you could buy Mexican for fifteen dollars an ounce, and suddenly you had Colombian, and Acapulco Gold, and Thai stick, and the next thing you know, Colombian is like twenty-five, thirty bucks an ounce, and you couldn't do Mexican, because it couldn't get you high any more.

Yeah. Colombian was pretty potent. We'd used to have some that was in feed bags, in animal feed, and we used to keep the bags for souvenirs. You cut them open -- they were burlap bags. I don't know why they imported them into this country, or anything else, but sealed inside, burlap on the outside, they had a certain feed company. and it said Bogota, Colombia on the bottom. It was quite a souvenir back in those days. It was a nice souvenir to hang on your wall back in those days. To show that you got something from Colombia, and it had an obvious reference to pot dealing.

So in Lowell -- was Lowell big on pot dealers? What was the pot atmosphere.

Yeah, there were a lot of small time people who used to go into Cambridge and Boston basically to pick up pounds, you know, single pounds. Of course there were always the entrepreneurs who would get ten, and get it cheaper. And then there was a few guys that went out to the West Coast.

I remember one guy, he went out to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, back in the very early 70's, right around '70, '71. On his first venture, he got busted in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico -- they were looking for aliens. They went through the car, and of course they had him open the trunk, and the found the pot. And they busted him there, and I think he wound up doing a little time, I forget how much. He did some other things... wound up getting murdered, did some deal where somebody got shortchanged and they blew his head off. That was early 70's

The early 70's, the dealing going on. Back in those days there were a lot of downers around too. I don't know where they'd get them from. There were a lot of break-ins. Years ago there were no burglar alarms on the stores, or none of these metal doors you pull down over the windows. You know I worked in a drugstore, way back. I used to take some of that cough syrup home with me, I'd tuck it in my belt and take

it home with me every goddamn night. The drugstores had no alarms. In fact D at one time kicked in a drugstore door.

Yeah, I think he told me about that.

Yeah, it was in a rainstorm. There was a horrendous rainstorm where the rain was coming down and it was thundering and all that shit. Him and another went and kicked the door in, and cleaned out the whole drug cabinet. And at that time, which was somewhere in the early 60's, what they had was worth like ten thousand dollars, which would probably be worth like forty or fifty thousand now. I would imagine. They had a shitload of drugs, and they'd get all fucked up on dilaudid, they had dilaudid from out of state.

And they got caught. They were taking a piss on the side of a highway, in a stolen car, with the trunk filled with drugs, you know. Along come the cops and bust them, first of all, for pissing. Then they found out it was a stolen car, and then they got in the trunk.

The other guy D was with grabbed a handful of dilaudid and he had it shoved down into his sock, and when they get into the cells, I think their cells were right next to each other, he handed him some...How many, I don't know, but enough to OD. D OD'd. D ate them, and OD'd. That's one of the number of times D OD'd. He should have been dead ... I figure I should have been dead four or five times. If that's the case, he should have been dead eight or ten times, believe me.

So there had to be an angel riding on his shoulder, or...

Yeah, and also on mine, because he did die indirectly because of drugs.

You told me that one theme of D's was, he could never feel high unless he did all the drugs.

Yeah, everything. He'd give somebody drugs to hold, pills or something fucking thing, just so he wouldn't have them right in front of him. Because if he had them in front of him, he just keep going and going and going until he passed out or whatever. He finally realized that, hey, look, what I'm going to do is, we're going to go get high, I'm going to give so-and-so everything else I have, and it'll be out of reach. So 2:30, 3 in the morning, he's calling so-and-so up, saying, hey, can I take a cab out there and get that? This is out in Billerica. And he'd be taking a fucking cab way out there, early in the morning, just to boost his high.

Back in the 60's what was Lowell like? Because Jack Kerouac doesn't say too much about Lowell, and I'm sure there was a lot of stuff going on, like bars, and little places

Yeah, yeah, yeah, actually Lowell was a town for Fort Devins, the soldiers to come in and get drunk. They had Ayer Ayer was a swinging town. Fort Devins is out there in Ayer, Mass. There were a whole bunch of clubs that a lot of Lowellians used to go to, go out and party out there. One of them was the Mohawk Club, and a lot of other ones. In the 60's and 70's they'd go out there, even in the 50's for that matter. And at the same time, the soldiers, who were so used to being local, they would be coming into Lowell. They had a whole run of bars in Lowell, all kinds of bars. There was a black bar called Ona's, where the black soldiers would hang -- we used to meet them there.

I remember Ona's and down the street was Simone's Hideaway.

Yeah, but that was later on. Right around the corner from Ona's was Sousa's, Ona's was an all black bar. We used to get a kick from going in there, because we knew one of the black guys who used to get us beer in the store when we were underage. We became good friends with him, he was part of a big family in Lowell. There'd be probably a dozen of his family in there won any given night, you know, cousins, he had a lot of brothers and shit. In fact their name was Choate, the Choate family.

We'd get a kick out of going in there fucked up one way or another, just knowing that nobody was going to bother us. We'd be the only white guys in there. Other whites -- if strangers came along, they'd be treated just like a black person would be treated down South, you know, kind of like "you're not welcome here," you know. But being with them was quite a kick. The music that was playing was always black music, black music back then, you know, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, whoever. There were no white songs in the jukebox, no Elvis or any of that shit, the Everley Brothers. It was all black songs in the jukebox. And they used to dance. And we'd get a kick out of that, it was quite an experience.

Didn't you tell me once about some apartment where they used to have gambling or prostitutes, and they had another apartment next door where they'd escape when the cops came?

That's when we were doing a lot of drinking, on Middlesex Street, right around the corner from the trailer, where they sell the hot dogs, you take a left, Middlesex Street's a one way, just up a little ways, across

from -- there'd used to be drugstore there -- what was the name of that?

Pikes.

Yeah, Pikes. Well there was a bar, that's still there. What's the name of the bar?

Butch's. It was Butch's. I don't know what it's called now. There was a McCollough's.

Yeah, well before McCollough's and across from the other bar. Across from this other bar, there were all kinds of derelicts and crazy people and shit. Well anyway, there was this black guy we knew, back in those days, he was retired from the army, and all he ever did was drink and party. He had a pension, he was in the Army for thirty-two years. His name was ??Crusher Nelson. He was real rugged, strong, you know, crazy little guy. We were like teenagers, early twenties and shit, this guy was in his fifties, and we would party with him.

Right down the hall from him was an apartment, and this other guy that he was in the Army with, his name was Odom, he had an apartment that was an all-night place. You'd walk in and he'd have a bar in there, and all kinds of forty-five records you could choose from. You know, put them in a stack, you'd kind of get in line, for the music to be played. Once again, it was all black music. Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, the uh....what's the name of that group?

The Platters?

The Platters. The Platters were the greatest. Do you like them?

I guess DG used to manage them a long time ago.

Aah, I don't know about that. He's full of shit.

The Platters were the greatest though. They sang some songs that -- I'll tell you -- touched your heart, especially when you were drinking.

[laughter]

And anyway, there would be, you'd walk in and this guy had two apartments. Next to each other. You'd walk in and there'd be a bar, and there'd be hookers...

Black hookers, or black and white hookers?

Oh no, black. With the music to play, and there'd be an all-night card game going on in one of the rooms. Many times I played cards all night, where would just be me, and all blacks. Then my buddy D would appear. He'd be the only other white, it'd just be a roomful of all blacks. We play poker all night long till the sun come up.

When they're playing, they're selling shots of whiskey, and you could get a case of beer back then, twelve ounce cans, for \$2.99 a case, cheap shit, real pissy beer, one of them was Genesee. They'd sell these cans of beer for fifty cents a can, and they'd make out quite well. Back in those days, a dollar meant something. So you'd pay three bucks a case, and get twelve bucks back, you made nine dollars, that's not bad. You go through several cases, that was good. If you played cards won fifty dollars in a night, that was good money back then. They'd also sell shots of whiskey out of the fifth, cheap whiskey, sell a shot for fifty cents

The apartment this guy had, if there was something downstairs, any suspicion, or anything that was going on, the cops come up pounding on the door -- he had another apartment that was adjoining, he went into the door, he went into another apartment that this woman used to have, she used to maintain another apartment. And we'd all go into that other apartment from the adjoining door, and it would be locked from her side. And when the cops came in, the place would be empty, there might be just one or two people sitting around.

There were other all-night places in Lowell. Maybe there still are. There were places you could go in Lowell to get beer, because that was the thing, that was the drug, just like you can go and get heroin or coke now at three or four in the morning or whatever.

We didn't stop drinking when the bars closed. There were all-night places where you can go and get a case of beer, quite expensive.

What about the Laconia, or the Cosmo?

Yeah, you could get it to go from the bars, like on a Sunday. On a Sundays, you couldn't buy beer anywhere. New Hampshire, you could.

Somebody once told me about a club or a bar you could smoke pot in.

There were no cool places like that that I know of. There were places where you might have been able to get away with it, but shit, the smell always lingered in the air, you know what I mean.

Again, like I said, back then you could get beer in all-night places just like you'd get drugs nowadays. I mean because, you were shut down, when the bars would close at one o'clock there was no place, you'd just stop partying at one o'clock in the morning, and went home -- that's what they wanted you to do.

What were the streets or the cops like at night? There must have been people ..

Dead. It was dead, back in those days. Nowadays everybody has a car. You got a family with a husband and a wife and a son and a daughter, that means maybe four cars in the family. Back then, it was one car in the family. I remember I drove my father's car. Most of my friends didn't have cars to drive, older teenagers, you know.

D you know, as soon as he got a car to drive, he'd wreck it, he'd hit fucking trees and everything else.

He was on the way out. They were doing a drug thing out in Chelmsford somewhere. He was the getaway guy. They went in, they were in the drugstore, somewhere up way out on Middlesex Street, way up, there's a cemetery out there, you have to over the line into Chelmsford, there's a cemetery, and there's two entrances, and on the far entrance there were four pillars.

I don't know if it was a drugstore, because there are no drugstores out there. But they were breaking in a place. D was driving around, and he couldn't drive for shit, and they're inside waiting for him, and he nods out at the wheel and crashes into one of these pillars and knocks it over.

And he'd hit the fucking pillar, and he went out cold, and they came and took him away, and meanwhile the other guys are still in the place they were breaking into, waiting for him. [laughs]

So was D very creative and artistic his whole life? You said that when you got a package of doctors' scripts, because he was such a good artist, he could forge the signatures. Was he always writing poetry?

Just drawings, a lot of drawings, a lot of drawings, a lot of it inspired by ... whatever...you know.

But did he get into Bukowski the same time as you? Did you guys get into Bukowski way back in the 60's

No, not that far back -- the 70's.

He turned me on to him in the 70's, you know, a Bukowski book.

Did he?

Because D seemed like the perfect Bukowski fan.

Yeah, I think the first one Bukowski wrote was the best one. He toned it down somewhat. There was a book he wrote called ??, something crazy like that. He was really hard hitting back in those days.

After the pot, there was an era in the 70's thatn was a coke thing. Coke was never heavy in the 60's was it?

No. I remember getting my hands on some coke in the early 70's, and nobody knew what it was -- nobody knew what it was, or wanted it. I had my hands on some, and I was like, what am I doing with this shit? Because I made a swap with somebody for something. These were people that we associated with the bikers down in the Boston area -- I won't mention any names, but...

A lot of this stuff, you know, came originally from the West Coast, from the big cities and shit, probably that because it came from Mexico, which was part of the Spanish connection that went into Peru and Colombia and all that shit.

Getting back to the pot, the Colombian came along, wiped out Mexican. It was very prominent for years, Colombian pot, tasted like hash, very seedy, vderly kick ass, you know real solid like punch you in the lungs type shit. It took over as far as pot went, that was the thing to buy. And what happened was, all of a sudden cocaine came along, and a lot of people involved with pot switched.

Pot has made a comeback, by the way, there's people making a living off pot. Back then there was also, and then when coke came along, it wiped it out. Because what was around was Colombian pot, and all of a sudden all this cocaine was coming from South America, Colombia and Peru, so now they're watching everything on these ships and shit, everything that's coming into the country, and looking for small packages of white powder, so of course they're going to stumble into

big bales of pot. So what happened was it wiped it out completely. All of a sudden, there was no more Colombia pot.

So does the pot come from Mexico now, or does it come from?

Now? No, most of it is from right here in this country.

Most of it is grown in California and ...

Yeah, supposedly. Yeah, most of it, they say, is from this country. But who am I to say? I don't know.

You talked about cough syrup and heroin, but now for a while heroin has been really cheap and a lot of people have done that. I know Dave the drummer, and he started snorting it, and he thought he'd be on top of it, and the next thing you know he was hooked.

Well you know there's a lot of young people into it right now, getting into it right now. But the people who are still into the pot, there's a lot of, **lot of** older people. Like I know a woman right now who 85 years old who smokes pot on a fairly regular basis.

Well, pot is a low-profile drug. You never see someone smoke a joint driving like they're drunk. It usually makes you more involved. I know in the 70's a probably smoked a half dozen joints a day. Now, most people I know, they might smoke a joint or two a day.

Yeah, you're getting older too. Age has a lot to do with it, I'm sure.

But you know it might be, it's kind of like a drug that's not going to make you look fucked up. Like with fucking speed, like you said, you're going be grinding your teeth, and if you take something like downs or fucking heroin, you're going to be nodding out.

The Colombian pot gone wiped right out, gone. Then after that what started coming around was sensemilla, and green weed.

Oh yeah? Was that in the 80's?

No, before that. Maybe like late 70's. Colombian pot was usually brown, okay, usually brown, sometimes gold brown, sometimes gold. Nobody wanted to hear green, green meant some homegrown shit from the back yard, right. Nobody wanted to hear it. You didn't try to show anybody any green.

In fact D used to take green homegrown pot and bleach it in the sun, in a baggy, just to turn it brown and sell it as brown pot. And people would buy it. I remember us talking a whole shit load of it, nobody wanted it because it was green, and bleaching it brown, and then it went.

The Colombian got wiped right out, so people were forced to smoke green. Then once they got smoking the green .. And back then too by the way, there was also the Jamaican, which was always brown. The Jamaican had an earthy taste to it.

Yeah, I remember there was always Jamaican pot too. Yeah, a dirt taste.

Yeah, and it was always brown, but not like the Colombian brown, it was more like a darker brown. The Colombian had a good punch to it, and the Jamaican did too, more so than the Mexican.

People were forced to smoke green, because they were watching all the imported stuff coming in, once again, like I said, looking for cocaine. There was a rise in the popularity of cocaine. They would stumble across bales of pot, so it was taboo --no more bringing in bales of pot. Before it was coming in all the time in bales.

So it switched over to domestic, I guess, from what I gather. But there's still, to this day, there's still shit coming from Mexico, no doubt about it. No reason why they can't make it as good as what's grown up here.

Every time it seems like, from the time when I was smoking in the early 70's till today, every time there was a drought, the next time the price went up. When the sensemilla started to come up, one day you're paying forty bucks an ounce, sixty bucks for an ounce, maybe, the next thing you know you're getting sensemilla, which is sticky, real strong, and you're paying like thirty bucks for a quarter ounce.

It depends how strong it is too, you know? What boils down to is how much you're paying for a hit, like you're standing there taking two, three, four hits and you're paying three dollars for it, when you broke it all down, is it really worth it? You know what I mean

When I came to Lowell in '77, I remember buying joints down on Adams Street. Do you remember ever having open places where you could buy pot, or drugs?

Oh yeah! [laughs] Lots. O shit! Late 60's we used to go down to the Boston Common, the Public Gardens. You'd walk through at night, and you'd hear people "Hash" "Mescaline" "Marijuana" -- marijuana, pot, whatever the hell they called it back then -- "LSD". You know, calling off whatever they were selling. No problem walking right through there and buying whatever you wanted. For awhile, until they clamped down on it, you know. That was the late 60's, back in the hippie days.

What did tripping come around?

The acid came along. There was all kinds, all sizes and shapes, all colors, all names. Plenty of blotter, White Lightning, Orange Sunshine of course, Purple Haze, Strawberry Fields. I could go on and on. Psychedelics ws big, real big.

And mushrooms?

Oh yeah, mushrooms. There were different kinds. There was a kind that came from down around Florida that was kind of gummy, and it tasted like you were eating a fart, it was terrible. But the ones from out on the West Coast were nice. They were about as big as your fingernail, and they had little stems, and you could eat the stems and get high. They were beautiful! They were really nice, because when you came down ... The acid back in those days had something added to it, for what reason I don't know.

We used to snort the acid.

Snort the acid?

Yeah, snort it. Some people would shoot it. It would be instant insanity if you shot it. I wouldn't do anything like that, but I used to snort it, because you get off within maybe fifteen, twenty minutes.

I know the times I would eat acid, and you wouldn't know that you were getting off, because you wouldn't get off for a couple of hours.

Yeah, it would take a while -- that's what sucked. You would snort it right up into the brain.

So, it wasn't like stuff you see on paper, it was like a pill...

Yeah, pills. At one time we were getting fifty-five dollars for a hundred hits of Orange Sunshine. It was so potent, you could take a razor blade and cut it into four pieces...

There was this one guy, he was sending stuff to a friend of mind. He sent some **pure** LSD. Man, there was like no crash at all, no hangover. But the other stuff, even the Sunshine, anything we got, they say had some strychnine added to it. But the pure, man, that was like floating, it was great, the colors, colors like you wouldn't believe. Back in those days, they really made some good LSD. You saw colors and trails.

You know, the city would be melting.

Oh, everything. Everything.

So what was an average acid trip? You know, you'd take it, and you'd be high. And then what would happen between the time you got high and the time you came down?

The first few trips? For me, the first hour or so was overpowering, you know, it was like, scary, it sucked.

It was like a roller coaster.

Ah, I could never stand it. It would come on and like pow. It would get to the point some of us would have taken downs with the acid to take the edge of that rush. You know that kind of a rush -- that was probably due to whatever they cut it with. But, we'd take downs, and that was pretty quick, and then we'd nod out on the downs, then we'd open our eyes, and the drapes would be moving, and the colors.

[laughter]

A butterfly would land on my nose and then I'd reach for it, and off it goes. Flutters back long enough to tease me, but never stays long enough to please me.

Yeah, it was pretty great, pretty great. We had dayglo paint, and a black room up in the attic. Well, everything in the room was painted dayglo, and we had dayglow things hanging, and mirrors and you couldn't see the threads, they were little black threads, and we had little dayglow things suspended there. Like birds just hanging there and shit -- you know, it was great, it was **very nice**, you know.

But I don't know if I recommend it to anybody, because I went to a shrink once, and he told me about people that flipped out on acid and never came back. That's when I changed my mind about it. But for myself, it was a great experience, many many times, you know. Many times.

I remember, I don't know why, but in the dark, having the shade all the way up, I remember looking up at the full moon and saying, why the fuck are these astronauts spending all this time and money going to the moon. That was so important back then -- "I'm going to the moon. Everybody take acid."

What year was that around Lowell?

Late 60's, early 70's.

How about music in Lowell? The Commodore Club was always big for a long time. Did it ever have music?

There were smaller places, but yeah, that was the big place. But that was just drinking and music and so on.

The acid faded also when the coke came in, you know, the acid kind of faded out. There were always acid heads and there still are. There are people now who take acid.

And mushrooms.

Yeah. D, even well into his forties, was doing acid. I was with him one night, and I wouldn't even consider it. It's like taking so many beating in the ring, and then it's all over. It's the same thing mentally -- you take so many beatings.

You got to throw in the towel, you got to know when to throw in the towel.

You got to quit, you got to quit. If you don't quit ... He just never knew when to quit. He kept doing it and doing it. One time myself and his son and another guy were out hitting the bars and shit, and he was OD'd.

How do you OD on acid?

You **lose** it. You don't know your name, you don't know who you are or where you are or why you are or when you are or if you are.

[laughter]

And he didn't know any of that! All he could do was just smile, a big shit-eating grin. He couldn't talk, you know, I'd wave my hand in front of him, and his eyes were glowing, and he was smiling big. And that was it.

Did he finally come down?

Yeah, he did eventually. I didn't think he was going to. I really didn't, I thought we lost him.

Do you any people personally that never came back from LSD?

Yeah, I saw a few.

They were alright, but they could never ...?

Yeah, oh yeah. It fucks minds up. It almost did mine at the end. I could only take so much. I had a few bad trips -- I had one real real bad trip. I couldn't do anything but just lay there.

And after that I was afraid to take a hit, because I thought it would overpower me. The same thing was happening -- it was fucking me up to the point that I didn't know my name. And I said, ah, I've got to cut down, I'm at that point.

So I started taking a quarter hit. The last time I ever took it was a quarter of a tab, and I was sitting in the attic stairway, trying to figure out, you know, who the... I thought I wasn't going to come back. I'll tell you, I was **scared**, big time scared.

What about things like Angel Dust and THC. Did you guys ever get into that?

Yeah, oh yeah. A lot of it.

You know, because that was big around here.

I used to get Angel Dust...

Now, what is Angel Dust?

Supposedly the same as the THC, and the THC, all that was, was PCP.

PCP is like horse tranquillizer.

Right, right. That's all it was. That wasn't a pleasurable high by any means. With some people, just getting fucked up is pleasurable, just to be able to say, "I'm not straight" or "I'm not normal." And I am high. But it's not a high that you'd identify as a pleasurable thing.

I know the period that I went through it with Angel Dust, a little bit, but especially with THC. It's like, I'd take a half a hit, and I'd be fucking puking, and it'd be worse than being like... you know, I was living above Tower News, and I'd have this little room, and I'd have somebody get me-- this in the 70's, some THC, and I'd take a half a hit, and it would be fucking worse than being drunk.

Oh, yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

Your body's fucked up, you're puking. And every time I'd say, this is the last fucking time. Then a couple weeks later...

It was just to do something so you could say you weren't straight. But I 've never got any pleasure from it, and I've done it many times, and I don't even know why. Just to say I was fucked up, just to be fucked up, just so I could say that I wasn't straight, and it sucked.

And it was the same thing. The Angel Dust was on parsley or mint flakes, and they were in a bag. And I had to cut it right in half, it was so powerful. The first time I smoked I couldn't even talk. It sucked, it was terrible.

Basically through all your drug history, and the different things you've taken, you think the safest thing that using doesn't fuck people up that much is smoking pot.

Probably, I don't know. I smoked for about thirty-five years and quit.

But as far as drinking goes, how many teenage kids do you read about -- they're speeding in their cars, and they're drunk they kill themselves. It's strange how history goes.

They say that pot leads to other things. But I've seen people go to other things without smoking pot, and I've seen people smoke pot and not go to other things. You know what I mean? It just happens that pot was first. If pot wasn't first, they still probably would have gone to the other things. If pot were not in existence, that does not mean that they would have experimented and ventured into these other things.

Take it ths same thing as: someone has a tendency to fucking kill somebody, and they say somebody ticked them off and made them do it -- you know, sometime in that person's life, they were a time bomb waiting to go off.

Hey, don't ever fucking say that or I'll kill you.

[laughter]

I'm sure you've got a lot more interesting stories about Lowell.

Oh, yeah.

People think of Lowell, they think of the mills, they think of Jack Kerouac. And Jack Kerouac never really hung around here.

No, he used to venture back, he used to come back and go down to, what the hell's that bar? -- they call it Chug's up on Wooten Street.